

FUTURE OF IMAGINATION 09

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Reviews

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(Sophia) Natasha Wei (Singapore), Vague Bloom, Future Of Imagination 9, Singapore. Photo by Jason Lim

Natasha Wei
Vague Bloom
Future of Imagination 9, Singapore
September 6, 2014
by Jennie Klein

Natasha Wei's Vague Bloom was a performance of tableaux, an exquisitely choreographed work that presented the audience with a number of vignettes. Dressed in a flowing tunic and black pants, Wei slowly moved through a series of poses using sunflowers, ice, dirt and a large red flower, which she held in her mouth for most of the piece. The entire effect was as if a French Impressionist painting had been rendered three-dimensional.

The two-hour performance began with Wei entering a large terrarium. For a long time she sat in silence, her back to the audience and the red flowers in her mouth, while holding a block of ice cubes. Placed alongside were other ice cube blocks and the sunflowers. Eventually Wei began arranging the sunflowers in the four corners of the terrarium. She spread the ice on the bottom of the terrarium and then stepped out in order to put two bags of dirt into the structure, giving the flowers some support and creating a space in which to plant them. Re-entering the terrarium, Wei lay down upon the dirt, almost as if she was going to bury herself underneath the flowers that remained in her mouth. After rearranging the flowers yet again, so that they were all clustered against the front of the plastic box, Wei released the red flowers and placed them at the base of the sunflower stems. Standing up, Wei held the pose for some time. The effect was as if she were a resurrected saint, the spirit of the flowers having been released into the soil. The performance ended with Wei stepping out of the terrarium and carefully arranging the flowers and dirt before bowing and exiting the space.

Wei's performances often address the human condition and the rituals and customs that make that condition possible. On the day that Wei performed, two large funeral pavilions, one Buddhist and one Hindu, had been set up just a few feet from the entrance to the space on Rowell road where her performance took place. Perhaps because of the proximity of the celebration of death and the afterlife, Wei's performance reminded me of a resurrection of sorts, as well as a release from expectations. Linda Montano, who has made a career of making performances that are inspired by her spiritual journeys through Catholicism and Hinduism, has often said to me that today's performance artists are yesterday's saints. Like those saints, they seek attention through corporeal privation, and, like saints, they offer themselves to others. As I watched, I felt that Wei was taking back the ecstatic visions of artists such as Gauguin and Van Gogh, who were also interested in religious expression, and presenting them from the vantage point of an Asian woman. No longer mute object, as was the case with Gauguin's Tahitian women and Van Gogh's Japanese-print inspired paintings, Wei reclaims the Orientalized spirituality of Van Gogh and Gauguin for herself.